

IMTs - Cobbled together or perfectly planned?

Initial observations from a study investigating familiarity within teams

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Introduction

Large fires are typically managed by Incident Management Teams (IMTs). Does it matter whether IMT members have previously worked together?

This project investigates the teamwork and decision making differences between pre-formed and ad-hoc IMTs.

Research Questions

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of pre-formed versus ad hoc IMTs?
- How may some of the potential advantages of pre-formed teams be incorporated into ad hoc teams?

Methodology

Two simulated bushfire scenarios were developed from recent Victorian incidents. It is anticipated that approximately 60 participants from existing pre-formed IMTs will undertake these scenarios as a member of a 4-person pre-formed and ad hoc team.



The ad hoc teams are created by mixing the participants from different pre-formed teams.

Each simulation involves teams in a range of activities including:

- Predicting fire development
- Operational planning
- Media liaison

Incident management experts assess each team for:

- The quality of decision making
- Teamwork
- Decision making outcomes
- The briefing provided to the incoming Incident Controller

Discussion

Only the first of four sets of simulation sessions have been completed so far. Preliminary results and observations from the initial simulation sessions include:

- Pre-formed teams generally performed better than the ad hoc teams
- The most effective teams had members who knew their roles and used efficient within team communication – talking less but achieving more
- The time taken for IMTs to develop trust in the competency of the role-played fireground commanders

- The tendency for teams to focus on managing the fire rather than planning ahead
- Some teams failed to configure the working space to make it more effective for their needs

Participants generally found the scenarios engaging and challenging. Several agencies have expressed interest in using these types of simulations as training or assessment tools for their IMT personnel.



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